

BYE ESTATE, HOUSE
(Byecroft, Old Congress)
Byecroft Lane, off Rt. 202
Holicong
Bucks County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-5588

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BYE ESTATE
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- Location: Byecroft Lane, south of Rt. 202, Holicong, Bucks County, Pennsylvania
- Significance: This is a very good example of a Bucks County farmhouse with the additive feature--it was built in four parts--which typifies the early dwelling of this region. The house includes a number of interesting, intact interior features.
- Description: This is a long, rectangular dwelling built in four parts, all of irregular-coursed uncut stone, with rough quoining, and only one room deep. The original section to the northeast is a two-story, two-bay wide structure with a gable roof. Across the front, over the first story bays, is a course of narrow, extended stone and, below that, the nailing blocks, that together once supported a pent roof. The doorways and windows have plain surrounds. The southeast front doorway is recessed (new door), and the front windows are six-over-six-light sash (with a small four-light casement in the second story over the entry). There is a second entry to the rear, with a plain surround with a simple molding backband and a vertical-board door, hung with strap hinges. There are nine-over-six light in the rear. The first-story windows have two-panel shutters. There is an interior chimney at the gable end.
- The next section, the largest (and most formal in detailing) is a two-and-a-half story, three-bay-wide section with a gable roof with a single dormer to the front. There is a doorway to the center of both the front and rear, covered by a pedimented hood. The front door is six-panel and the rear, four. The windows in the first floor are nine-over-six light sash with round-arch lintels and paneled shutters. On the second floor the windows are six-over-six light sash, without visible lintels (windows rise to cornice).
- Adjoining this section to the southwest is a two-and-a-half story, two bay wide section. This section is of the same height as the one adjoining but the windows are at a lower level. The front elevation has two nine-over-six light sash windows on the first floor (with shutters) and two six-over-six light windows on the second, and a single dormer. To the rear, one of the first floor bays is a doorway, and there is an added four-light casement window in the eaves.
- The last section, at the southwest end, is a one-and-a-half story, two-bay wide section with a gable roof that slopes down to form the roof of a (screened) porch across the front with a single dormer.
- On the interior, the early, northeast section has rather crude interior finish. There is a huge fireplace at the northeast wall, with a bake oven and cranes. It is rubble stone with a large stone hearth (currently with a wood-burning stove). To either side are built-in cupboards with simple vertical board doors hung with HL hinges. The hand-hewn floor joists are visible in the ceiling and the floors

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are of random width planks. A boxed winder stairway was removed to create more space and a simpler stairway install, at the southwest wall. A small modern kitchen has been added. There is a bedroom and a bath above.

The interior of the adjoining section is the most formal. The first floor is one room deep with an adjoining hall-and-parlor effect. The front doorway enters into the northeast parlor with adjoins the southwest parlor with a large doorway. Both rooms have paneled fireplace walls with built-in cabinets, etc. hung with HL hinges and painted. Each has a doorway, on the northeast side it is a doorway to a boxed winder stairway and on the southwest, into the next (dining room) section. Both rooms have cornice molding, chair rail and baseboard, plastered walls and ceilings, and wide plank flooring. There are bedrooms above it. The windows are recessed with panels below (a later addition) but have no surrounds.

The next section is also one room deep. It has exposed beam ceilings, wide plank flooring, recessed windows without surrounds, and wainscoted walls. There is a large cooking fireplace on the southwest wall, with a former bake oven (bricked up when the kitchen was added behind it) and cranes. There is a boxed winder stairway in the south corner. There is a bedroom and a bath above. The bedroom includes a small, plaster-finished fireplace, with a cabinet to one side, and a closet, around to the side of the protruding chimney block.

The last section is a more recent kitchen addition. There are basements under all sections except the original ca. 1702 section.

History:

In 1699 Thomas Bye purchased 600 acres from William Penn, and the property has remained in the Bye family ever since. The original section of the house is believed to have been built by Thomas Bye ca. 1702. This section has been referred to as "Old Congress" because, according to the records of the nearby Buckingham Quaker Meeting, this was the site of their meetings from 1702-1710, before the meeting house was erected. According to family tradition, Thomas Bye arrived from England (at 60 years of age) with his son, and built a log house on the property. His wife, Margaret, arrived in 1702 with their four children, and the stone section was added. Sometime later the log section burned.

The next section was said to have been built in 1730-1732--the same year as the old barn--by Nathaniel Bye. Nathaniel is listed in deeds as a "fell-monger" or fur trader. His parents, Thomas and Margaret, had passed away in 1724 and 1726, respectively, at which time he returned to the homestead. Nathaniel's addition to the house created two large rooms up and down (with a full basement), all with fireplaces, connected by a boxed winder stairway. The old section was presumably used as a kitchen. Nathaniel's refined, gentleman-farmer home was said to have been built from the proceeds for his fur trade and from a limestone quarry on the property, as well as a limestone kiln (for mortar).

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This home was inherited by his son, Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth Ross. It was he who added the next section--then used as a new kitchen and bedroom above--supposedly to accommodate his seven children, ca. 1775. The property was inherited by his son, Thomas II, upon his death in 1786. A third floor bedroom was added to this section in the 1830s or 1840s, accessed by a boxed winder stairway.

A more modern kitchen was reportedly added to the southwest of the house ca. 1870-1875, with a frame, shed-roofed addition. A cistern and hand pump were added to the front (now covered by the stone terrace but accessible). This kitchen was removed in 1934-1935 by Arthur E. Bye and the current kitchen was added (with a bedroom above and a full basement below). At the same time, electricity, steam heat, three bathrooms and a sewerage system were added. Arthur Bye restored art, working both for museums and individuals, and had a studio in the barn. The farmlands have been rented out since Arthur's day. The house is currently the property of Gerald Bye, who lives in Philadelphia, and the house is rented.

Outbuildings:

There is an old, ca. 1730s stone barn on the property that was converted into a dwelling house by Arthur Bye's sister, in 1962. It is currently the home of Gerald's sister, Margaret Bye Richie and her husband. It was previously used to keep pigs and chickens, with a hay loft above. The stone walls are covered with stucco, with tie rods for support. There is now a doorway to the center with a hood over it. To either side are six-over-six light double-hung sash windows. It has two interior stone chimneys, and a frame addition to one side.

Next to this is a newer barn, with a rubble stone foundation and board-and-batten walls. The foundation level has stalls and the upper levels now have double-hung sash windows. Part of the interior of the barn was converted into an art studio by Arthur Bye.

Sources:

Interview with Mr. Gerald Bye, current owner of the Bye Estate, October 1990.

Richie, Margaret Bye. National Register of Historic Places--Inventory Nomination Form, The Byecroft Farm Complex, etc., prepared June 1982.

Historian:

Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, April 1991